

SOCIALIST STUDIES

No. 1

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**OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF
THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN**

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SOCIALIST

STUDIES

This occasional journal is the joint production of the Camden and N.W. London branches of the SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN, and we have titled it 'Socialist Studies'. Its object is to fill a gap in Party education by highlighting fundamental aspects of the Party case and indicating to would-be propagandists the kind of knowledge members of the working-class must have if they are to become Socialists.

The Socialist case must be argued and not just stated. Socialist propaganda has its origins mainly in the field of history, economics and politics, and the Party has made many contributions in these areas. Its contributions to political understanding are a direct result of its practical experiences in the field of political action and not just based on theory, however useful. Socialism has to be explained to the working-class in a practical way - in simple language, factual, accurate and to the point. The old, deeply held view of workers that wage labour and capital are a fixed and unchanging part of their lives, must be dispelled and the greater benefits of life in Socialism shown to be a practical possibility.

Over a long period we have built up a tremendous store of information on every subject which can be directly related to Socialist propaganda. For example, our analysis of the State and the machinery of government, the Russian Revolution, modern war, the Trade Union movement, the reform movement and Marxian economics. Our intention over the forthcoming months is to publish or re-publish a variety of articles which will outline the structure of our case against the capitalist system of production, and the private ownership of the means of living. This will be done in conjunction with a series of propaganda lectures which are now a well-established feature of the branches' activities. Our journal is intended purely as a vehicle for Socialist propaganda, aimed in particular at potential speakers and writers within the Party. Whilst some of the material may have been written many years ago, the basic position of the SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN remains unchanged and is as valid today as when it was first stated.

SOCIALISM AND PARLIAMENTARY ACTION

The following letter from a correspondent in Glasgow is printed in full and our reply follows:

To SPGB

Comrades,

The SPGB holds that supreme power in present day society is political, and is centered in Parliament, owing to the fact that Parliament controls the armed forces. As proof of this, it is stated that Parliament votes the necessary money for maintaining the armed forces, from year to year. The SPGB say that to get control of the armed forces is to get control of political power; and logically deduce from this that when a class-conscious majority of the electorate sends Socialists to Parliament they will control the armed forces. That, from that day forward, "everything in the garden will be lovely," and that Capitalism will die a sudden death.

But I am afraid that there are one or two things the SPGB has forgotten, such as, that Parliament only controls the armed forces when the Capitalist class have a majority there and as a Socialist majority will not take away their (the Capitalists') money, the latter will still be able to pay (and handsomely at that) for the maintenance of the armed forces. This the more easily, since the officers are all members of the Capitalist class. For proof of this it has only to be stated that it takes more than the pay or salary of an officer to maintain his position as such. As everybody knows, most of the wartime "officers" are today on the bureau, or begging in the streets. That the Capitalist class are preparing for "the day" is surely obvious to anyone who has "eyes to see," when organisations such as the Secret Service, OMS, Fascisti, etc. are already in existence and for a purpose which they do not seek to hide.

Also we should not lose sight of the fact that "specials" and other auxillary forces (Black and Tans) were organised at short notice when occasion demanded, in the past.

The logic of this is that Capitalism will be abolished like all past systems of society, not through the method of capturing Parliament, but at the barricades. Further, does the SPGB deny that Finance Capital, through the medium of the Cabinet, dictates the policy of Parliament? Hoping that this communication is published in full when answered. Yours for revolution.

ANTI-PARLEY.

OUR REPLY

The above letter contains the usual anarchist objections to political action which have been answered continually in the "Socialist Standard."

In the first place, we must correct some crude mis-statements by our critic. We do not say that "everything in the garden will be lovely" when a class-conscious working class controls Parliament. The capture of the political machinery is, as Marx says in the Communist Manifesto, the first step which must be taken to obtain emancipation. The succeeding conditions may be quite unlovely, depending on the circumstances of the time and the degree of counter-revolution attempted.

The statement that Parliament only controls the armed forces whilst Capitalists are in the majority in Parliament is pure bunkum. Parliament is a machine which arose and evolved long before Capitalism. The tremendous outlay of finance and effort on the part of Capitalists to ensure that the workers vote for Capitalist candidates and their lackeys shows how important control of Parliament is. Then we are told that Socialist control of Parliament will allow Capitalists to have their money to pay for the upkeep of the armed forces for their own use

The actual fact is that the armed forces are maintained out of funds voted by Parliament. These huge sums are obtained from taxation paid by the employer out of the surplus extracted from the results of the workers' labour. This exploitation will stop when workers control political power and hence the funds out of which Capitalists can pay armies will cease.

The Capitalist system could not be run by bodies of employers hiring some armed bands to attack the whole working class. Capitalism depends on the regular and smooth conduct of affairs under which the wheels of industry can turn, commerce be carried on and profits be obtained. Therefore a constitution with delegated functions and a Parliament controlling nationally the forces of repression is an essential thing to the life of Capitalism in all "advanced" countries. Therefore, the resolute efforts of all those aiming at conquest of the social powers, to control the political machine. Mussolini in Italy or Lenin in Russia, or the worldwide struggles of rising Capitalists - each had first of all to conquer political power as represented in the political machinery of each country.

Our policy is framed for the country in which we live, according to existing conditions. Parliament being the central machine of the present constitution, we are compelled to control it in our own interests as a working class. Should the Capitalists destroy the constitution, the situation would be changed and the detail policy of the workers would be different. But this assumption of destruction of Parliamentary institutions reckons without the facts of economic life. In destroying the constitution the Capitalists would cripple their system. Capitalism in advanced countries depends upon government by elected authority, local and national and the disruption of these bodies would result in chaos, not in a system. The incitement to open warfare resulting from the abolition of Parliament would prevent that ordered working of affairs upon which Capitalism depends.

After denying the power of Parliament, our critic admits its importance and its power by pointing out that finance capital dictates the policy of Parliament. It is obvious, even to our confused critic that not merely content with having the finance, the financiers find it essential to influence the policy of Parliament. That they can do so is due to the fact that it is in the interest of their fellow Capitalists in Parliament to carry out the wishes of the bankers etc. A Socialist working class intent on abolishing Capitalism would have a policy directly in conflict with the interests of Capitalists, financial or industrial, and the day of Parliament carrying out the wishes of the Capitalist would be over.

While "Anti-Parley" states that the army is officered by the Capitalists, he also tells us there is a large number of officers on the dole. Does that show officers belong to the Capitalist class? Actually it shows that when Parliament votes no funds for them, they are sacked; Officers in the main are not Capitalists. The Capitalists, being few, are compelled to hire workers to run the system, and also the civil and military forces to control it. Further, officers are helpless without an army and the army acts, not according to its officers, but according to instructions which are given by those in charge of political power.

If the officers do not carry out instructions they are liable to severe punishment, apart from losing their position. The reference to a large number of officers on the dole, shows how rapidly they can be trained and how many are available. If our critic studied history, he would know that officers, to maintain themselves, are compelled to transfer their allegiance to those who control political power and who can give them jobs. Look at the huge number of German officers who took well paid jobs to organise the famous Red Army of Russia. Look at the helpless state of Czarist officers in March 1917 when the rank and file revolted.

We are next told capitalists are preparing for "the day" by forming the OMS, Fascists etc. These bodies depend for success on recruiting workers to their ranks, while they can obtain a large measure of working class support, it shows the need for Socialist propaganda. For until the mass of workers understand their class interests, they cannot be expected to act in the interests of their class. The dangerous and misleading alternative to Parliamentary action is - the barricades. What then becomes of his argument about officers of the Capitalist class being in command of the Army? How can unarmed workers fight the army?

In these days of powerful instruments of death dealing and after the experience of the World War - we are told by our anarchist opponent to throw up some barricades! The lessons of the Paris Commune, of the Rand, of Munich, of Hungary, etc. are all lost on our "anti-parley" friend. Read Engels' introduction to Marx's "Class Struggles in France" (1895) on the insanity of barricades in face of modern developments!

Apparently our critic has been listening to the anarchist element denouncing Parliament and as neither the anarchists nor others can tell him any alternative to Parliamentary action, he falls back upon the policy that reactionaries everywhere have tried to get workers to adopt so that they can drown them in blood. Barricade or bombs, chemical parcel post or street fights our opponents advocate everything except the one policy Socialist knowledge, Socialist organisation and Socialist political action by a united working class. Our opponents' alternative shows, the enemies of political action become dangerous to the working class.

IS THE SPGB AFRAID TO CRITICISE TRADE UNIONISM?

A correspondent who gives no address because he is "on tramp" asks an unusual question. His letter and our reply are given below:

Dear Sir,

I have become a reader of the SOCIALIST STANDARD but I am told by a great many people that the SPGB is afraid to criticise Trade Unionism, because the Party would become unpopular. I do not know the SPGB view concerning this. I maintain that if Trade Unionism were universally adopted it could only result in failure because of the fact that wages are adjusted to the cost of living and vice versa, therefore wages, however high, would not raise the standard of living. I fully admit that the Trade Unions as they stand at present, do benefit their members but only at the expense of the community, as increased costs raise the cost of living. These facts prove the fallacy of Trade Unionism. If there is any truth in the statements made as regards SPGB members all being staunch Trade Unionists, then the Party will have a hard job in trying to explain these facts away.

J.B. MARSHALL.

OUR REPLY

Our correspondent's question is unusual, because a very frequent complaint made by critics of the SPGB has been that we are unduly critical of trade unionism, if not actually hostile. The truth is the SPGB recognises the value of trade unionism in resisting the constant pressure of the capitalists on the workers' standard of living, but recognises too, that the trade unions are in the main concerned with the day-to-day struggle within capitalism and not with the task of overthrowing capitalism.

This is necessarily the case because a trade union has to accept to its ranks all workers who are willing to join for its limited purposes. A trade union which restricted its membership to those who seek the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of Socialism would - in present circumstances - be a very ineffective body, because it would be excluding a majority of the workers. While supporting trade unionism, the SPGB need not, and does not, support or defend those speeches and actions of trade unions and their officials which are contrary to working class interests and Socialism.

Our correspondent argues that trade unions are to be condemned because higher wages mean higher prices and are at the expense of the "community." This is an error which has on occasion been used by the capitalists to dissuade workers from joining trade unions or taking part in strikes. The attitude of the employer is sufficient to show they are under no such illusion. If employers thought that higher wages can simply be passed on in the form of higher prices, they would not resist trade union demands. The employers know better. They know that higher wages are a direct cut into profits - hence their resistance to such demands.

Although wages are affected by changes in the cost of living, the relationship is not an automatic one. Workers have to struggle to raise wages when prices rise and have to struggle to prevent wages from falling when prices are stable or falling. An illuminating discussion of the economics of the problem may be found in two pamphlets by Karl Marx, "Wage Labour and Capital" and "Value Price and Profit".

PROBLEMS OF SOCIALIST ADMINISTRATION

A correspondent (D.G.D., Clapham) asks the following question:

When you have convinced the working class of the futility, as far as they are concerned, of the present system and have also got them to accept the principles of Socialism, you will be in a position to get power. Having got power you will convert the means of production and distribution into the common property of society, and they will be placed under the democratic control of the whole people. My question is this: what form of organisation will you set up to run this country? Will it be based on a Central Government, or on local government, or on a sectional basis? Your speakers, when questioned on this matter, stated that nobody could say what the organisation would be. In regard to details, I agree with this, but surely your Party must have some conception of the bare outlines of the form society will take. It is ridiculous to put forward a plan to overthrow the capitalist system and then say to the workers that you've no idea of what you're going to do after that, but it will all come out all right in the crash.

OUR REPLY

Our correspondent's difficulty is one which troubles many who are sympathetically disposed towards Socialism but who feel that some definite plan is required.

Much of the difficulty arises, we suggest, out of a mistaken view of the conditions which will exist when the workers take power in their hands. Our correspondent's final words illustrate this. He thinks of Socialism coming to birth out of conditions of chaos, his actual phrase being "the crash." This is a mistaken view. Chaos could arise, and does arise, when a minority seizes power and tries to introduce more or less fundamental changes against the wishes of the majority of the population, or when the majority are apathetic and lack understanding of what is being done.

But the inauguration of Socialism implies (as our correspondent recognises) the support and understanding of the majority of the population. There can be no "crash." The workers will simply carry on with the operation of industry, transport, administration with the elimination of its capitalist features. Changes will be introduced in orderly fashion, as agreed by the workers themselves in cooperation with their fellows in other lands. The basis of industrial organisation and administration will start from the arrangements existing under capitalism at the time of the transformation, and this will present no difficulties because the Socialist movement will be thoroughly international, both in outlook and in practical organisation. As far as the machinery of organisation and administration is concerned, it will be local, regional, national and international, evolving out of existing forms.

Railway organisation, for example, would naturally follow the land areas served by the railway systems, but would need to be co-ordinated with local road services, international air services and steamship routes. Postal services would (as now) require both local, national and international organisation. Administration would follow similar forms, doubtless with the utmost variety of modifications to meet local needs in the different continents.

To those who think of the problem against the present background of property interests and national rivalries, this presents overwhelming difficulties. To the Socialist, who sees that with the abolition of the capitalist basis, the urge toward cooperation is released from its present imprisonment, the problems of Socialism fall into their proper perspective.

THE ABOVE LETTERS AND REPLIES HAVE BEEN CONDENSED FROM ISSUES OF THE 'SOCIALIST STANDARD' AND STILL REFLECT THE POSITION OF THE PARTY TODAY

OPPOSITION TO OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES

THAT AS ALL POLITICAL PARTIES ARE BUT THE EXPRESSION OF CLASS INTERESTS, AND AS THE INTEREST OF THE WORKING CLASS IS DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED TO THE INTERESTS OF ALL SECTIONS OF THE MASTER CLASS, THE PARTY SEEKING WORKING CLASS EMANCIPATION MUST BE HOSTILE TO EVERY OTHER PARTY

This clause prevents the Socialist Party of Great Britain or its members from belonging to or supporting other political parties in this country. Many people who think that in a general way they sympathise with our case find this hard to accept. They ask: Why will you not join up with other socialist parties? Why not support campaigns for reforms?

The chief reason why this clause was included in our Declaration of Principles is that our objective is not the same as those of other parties claiming to be socialist whose aims are completely incompatible with ours. Socialism is not compatible with trying to administer capitalism or improve it with reforms. Nationalisation is of no use whatever to the working class and has nothing to do with Socialism. If the whole of the Labour Party programme was carried out it would leave capitalism intact and would not have brought Socialism nearer.

For the Socialist Party to work with non socialist parties would create confusion and make it harder for the workers to understand the socialist case. What is needed is for each worker to make the crucial choice between capitalism and Socialism, to reject the one and support the other. For this the utmost clarity is required, not the confusion that would inevitably follow from associating with those who profess to support Socialism but who in their deeds are its enemies.

MEETINGS

CAMDEN AND NORTH WEST LONDON BRANCHES THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

SATURDAY 14th January 1989 3 pm

RUSSIA'S NEW REVOLUTION. PERISTROIKA AND GLASNOST.

Speaker J. D'Arcy

SUNDAY 22nd January 1989 3 pm

POLITICAL ACTION DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY OR INTELLECTUAL MINORITY

Speaker R. Lloyd

SATURDAY 11th February 1989 3 pm

THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN STATE CAPITALIST RUSSIA

Speaker A. Buick

SUNDAY 19th February 1989 3 pm

THE LABOUR PARTY POWER WITHOUT PRINCIPLES

Speakers D. Davies & C. May

SATURDAY 4th March 1989 3 pm

REFORM OR REVOLUTION FROM CHARTISM TO SOCIALISM

Speakers P. Deutz & T. D'Arcy

SUNDAY 19th March 1989 3 pm

IS MARXISM OBSOLETE ?

Speaker E. Hardy

ALL SATURDAY MEETINGS will be held at the Abbey Community Centre, Belsize Road, NW6. (corner of Abbey Road, next to Lillie Langtry Pub)
Nearest tube stations: Kilburn Park (Bakerloo) and Swiss Cottage and West Hampstead (Jubilee).

ALL SUNDAY MEETINGS will be held at the Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont Street, WC1. Nearest tube station; Russell Square, (Picadilly) 5 mins.

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NORTH WEST LONDON BRANCH meets on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays in month, 7.30 pm, Abbey Community Centre, Belsize Road NW6. Correspondence to: C. May, 71 Ashbourne Court, Woodside Park Road, N12 8SB

CAMDEN BRANCH meets on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday in month, 6 pm, the Marchmont Community Centre, 62 Marchmont Street, WC1. Correspondence to: T. Dobson, 198 Inchmery Road, Catford, SE6 1DF

VISITORS WELCOME, ADMISSION FREE, QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION.

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

OBJECT

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

- 1 That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
- 2 That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce, and those who produce but do not possess.
- 3 That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
- 4 That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
- 5 That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
- 6 That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
- 7 That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
- 8 The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.